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Congressman

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BUYER  
JOINT HEARING BY SUBCOMMITTEES ON  
MILITARY READINESS, PERSONNEL, AND INSTALLATIONS  
AND FACILITIES**

*September 25, 1998*

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to thank you for conducting this hearing today. I know there was some controversy about the timing of the hearing, but I think it is important to get the perspective of field commanders before the Joint Chiefs testify later this month.

A core responsibility of this Committee is to give oversight on the military's readiness to fight and win our nation's wars. As you know Mr. Chairman, this Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Spence, has, for several years, documented this administration's strategy-forces-resources mismatches and expressed grave concerns about the readiness of our forces. Heretofore, those concerns have been repeatedly declared anecdotal, and the Pentagon's civilian and uniformed leadership endeavored to refute or minimize them.

Now, it has become almost fashionable for commanders to elaborate on their problems. Mr. Chairman, while I believe there is ample justification to be outraged, I am grateful that we may finally be getting the full facts presented to the American public. Perhaps with the full truth we will be in a position to do something to get the defense of our nation back on the track.

From the perspective of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, I can tell you that the truth is not pretty.

- The Navy will miss its recruiting goal by over 7,000 for fiscal year 1998 and retention is far below the levels required to sustain the force. As a result, the Navy has 18,000 vacant

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positions in the fleet and will violate the law by coming in under the end strength floor by over 5,000 people. The Navy's ability to retain people—whether aviators, surface officers, nuclear officers, SEAL officers, or enlisted members in all grades—is in serious jeopardy.

- The Army will also fail to comply with the end strength floor during fiscal year 1998 with a projected shortfall of 1,800 people. Although the Army claims to have met recruiting objectives, it took over \$170 million in recruiting adds over the past two years to stay competitive. By the Army's own admission, they do not understand whether a drop in enlisted retention is a return to historical levels, or a dangerous shift in attitudes about a military career.
- The Air Force, historically the strongest recruiting and retention service, is projecting to come within 200 people of violating their end strength floor in fiscal year 1998. The Air Force will cite troubled recruiting and degraded retention as the cause. Additionally, there would seem to be no end to the pilot exodus from the Air Force where the lure of bigger bonuses is only attracting 26 percent of eligibles. They need 50 percent to sustain the force.
- Marine Corps recruiting is meeting its goal this year, but only after adding \$16.8 million to recruiting advertising, incentives and operations. To achieve that goal, they must work their recruiters very hard with over 75 percent working more than 60 hours a week. The Marine Corps is also not immune to the aviator exodus where retention falls short of the level required to sustain the force and separations doubled in a single year.

Mr. Chairman, I can honestly say that I am looking forward to the testimony of these field commanders. I think we will find their honest assessment of readiness a refreshing change from the restrained testimony we have heard in the past. I just regret that it took the emergence of a real crisis to bring us to this point of frank and open discussion.